



The Royal City

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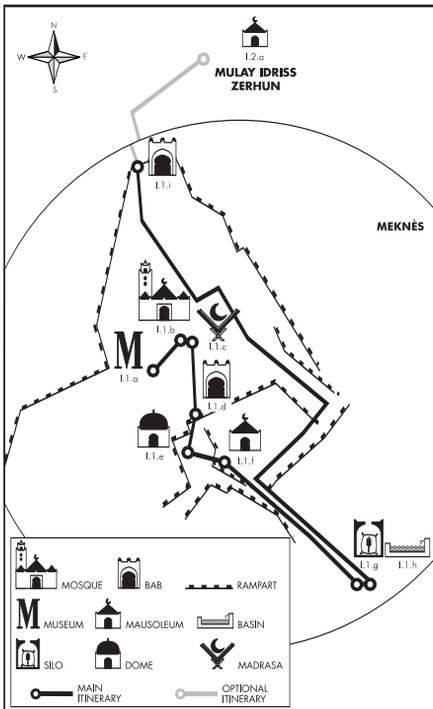
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Mulay Isma'il



*Mulay Isma'il
Mausoleum, third
courtyard, Meknès.*

Bab al-Mansur,
general view, Meknès.



In Arab-Muslim culture, the location of the “Royal City” which the sovereigns inhabit is primordial. It always occupies a large area, whether located in al-Andalus, the Maghreb or the Mashreq. Often surrounded by ramparts, it encompasses the palaces of the sovereign as well as its amenities, its gardens or *riyads*, the living quarters of the court and of high dignitaries, the commercial districts and currency-minting workshops.

It is certainly the case that the origin of this spatial plan in general and of the Royal City in particular is not Andalusian; indeed it dates back to the Greeks, the Romans, the Persians, and finally the Muslim dynasties of the Mashreq. But the framework on which cities are planned, particularly in Morocco, owes as much to this direct Eastern influence as to the influence of the Andalusians. One sees this framework as clearly in Granada and in Seville as one does in Fez, in Marrakesh and in Meknès. For all the towns in al-Andalus or in Morocco, and right up until the 11th/17th century,

the predominant framework of town planning was bipolar: the *medina* on one side and the Royal City or *kasbah* on the other.

The Royal City of Meknès, as it was conceived by the ‘Alawite Sultan Muly Isma‘ail, is particularly representative of this type of town, which bases itself on the Eastern structuring of space, whilst maintaining the ornate decor and colouring of al-Andalus, and the local Moroccan architecture developed by great princes. Using a Merinid urban community as his starting point, the ‘Alawite Sultan Muly Isma‘il (1082/1672–1139/1727), surrounded by counsellors amongst which were a number of Andalusians, undertook, during the 55 years of his reign, enormous constructions, built primarily of hard-packed clay, which housed thousands of people: workers who had come from all round Morocco, as well as slaves, prisoners of war and Christian captives. There are a number of reports written by foreign chroniclers who witnessed or even participated in the building projects, such

as the Frenchman Mouette, kept prisoner from 1670 until 1681, who worked for years on monuments raised by the king, and who published, in 1683, an account of his captivity. According to his account, Mulay Isma'il firstly cleared the Almoravid *kasbah* where he had settled, by tearing down the buildings which were adjacent to him. A clearing appeared which became known as al-Hedim or "of the Debris" due to the amount of material amassed at this spot following the successive demolitions, creating a natural barrier between the *medina* and the *kasbah*. An enclosure was thus erected separating the *kasbah* from the rest of the town: it consisted of a simple interior enclosure which had neither a path nor a bastion, and a separate exterior enclosure, which was 9–12 m. high and was pierced with various gates. Inside the *kasbah*, a vast quadrilateral area, approximately 500 m. x 1000 m., housed the three palaces which Moulay Ismail had built: the Grand Palace, *Dar al-Kebira*, to the east of the *medina*, and the Imperial

Palace, *Dar al-Makhzen*, containing the *Dar al-Madrassa* and the *Dar al-Mehencha* palaces. *Dar al-Kebira*, whose construction began in 1082/1672, was intended to house the royal family and close relatives of the king. An architectural complex covering over 13.5 hectares, set apart from other palaces in the *kasbah*, it was composed of several palaces which together contained a whole body of functions: patios, reception rooms, *hammams*, kitchens and gardens.

In contrast to this first Isma'ili palace, which was densely built and very urban, the Imperial Palace, *Dar al-Makhzen*, the principal residence of Mulay Isma'il, occupied a space far smaller than the vast expansive area occupied by the gardens, making Meknès, according to the historian Ibn Zidane, "a town in the countryside and a countryside in the town". This part of the *kasbah*, enclosed by high walls, encompassed, within a space of about 60 hectares, two palaces which were separated from each other by a fence forming an impressive passageway: *Dar al-Madrassa* and *Dar al-Mehencha*.



Dome of the Ambassadors, park and rampart, Meknès.

Conscious to preserve the city from all threats, whether external or climatic, the sultan had immense underground silos and provision sheds installed at 500 m. from the palace, in case of drought or an eventual siege of the city. An artificial tank, known as the Basin of Norias, was placed next to the silos, and was intended to provide water for the city.

Due to the architectural originality, the grandeur and the beauty of both private and public monuments, every traveller was impressed by the enormity of Mulay Isma'il's work, as the description by Father Dominic Buscot, who came to Meknès in 1704 to buy back Christian slaves, testifies: *"On approach, this town seemed to me to be something significant, as much by its sprawl, the quantity of its diverse houses, and the elevation of several mosques as by its pleasant variety of gardens, in which an infinite number of fruit trees of all kinds grew; we see the Alcassave or the Palace of the king,*

Grain Silos, interior of the House with Ten Norias, central corridor, Meknès.



which appeared to finish the town off magnificently towards the north. The grandeur of its enclosure, the building of a number of pavilions covered in varnished tiles with the pointed tips of two or three mosques, giving us a completely different impression than that which we got when we saw them up close..."

Through the richness in their conception and lay-out, the Isma'ili palaces conformed to this sumptuous image of the palace and of Arab dwellings, evoking patios and fountains, leafy shades and alleyways, basins and kiosks. And even if what is left of the city today is only a fraction of what Mulay Isma'il built, the visitor can still dream of past splendours and appreciate this *"architected nature"* which reflected perfectly the requirements of a Moroccan princely court of the 11th/17th century.

Meknès, originally *Meknassa al-zitun*, "Meknès of the olive trees", was born through the settlement of a branch of the Zenets Berber tribe, called the Meknassa, on the riverbanks of the Bufekran wadi valley. Attracted by the fertility of the soil and the abundance of water, and having taken advantage of the power struggle which was agitating the north of Morocco following the fall of the Idrissid dynasty, these Berbers established a series of small, non-fortified conglomerates, which centred themselves within gardens.

When the Almoravid Prince Yusuf Ibn Tashfin seized these "garden-towns" in 455/1063, he set up a military garrison or *kasbah* on the site of the ancient *medina*. The Almohads, arriving in Meknès in 544/1150, put themselves in charge of enriching the town with the construction of murals and fountains. The town, or more accurately the four townships which formed it, were modest, and its place on



Basin of the Norias, enclosure of the ancient silos reinforced with buttresses, Meknès.

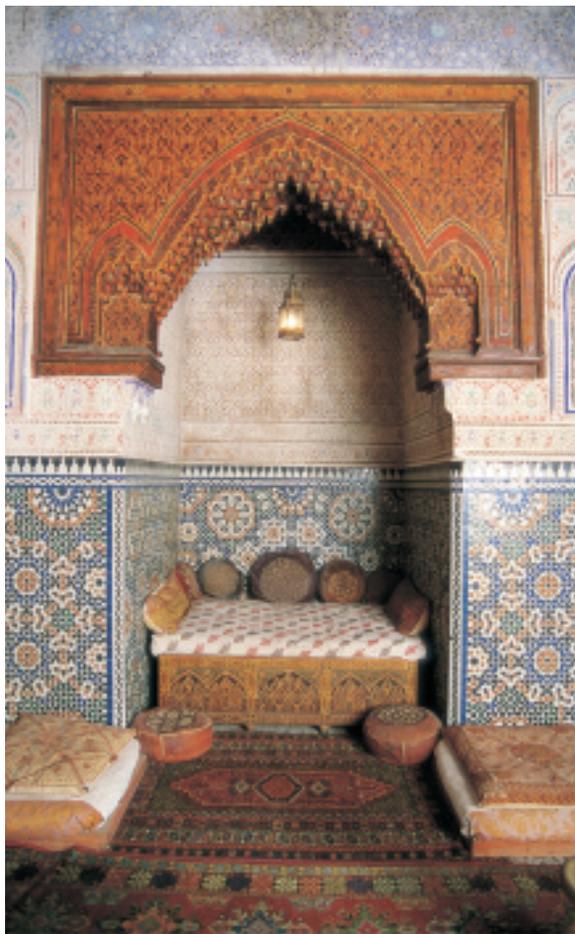
the chequer board of Moroccan cities remained significantly limited.

On the Merinids' accession to power in the middle of the 7th/13th century, the town, from being a large citadel, became a commercial centre with its own *funduq*, *madrasas* and mosques. The city thus became the residence of *viziers* – the ministers – while Fez remained the city of princes. During the time of Abu Inan (752/1351–759/1358), several Andalusian families came to settle in Meknès and in its surrounding area. The Cordobans and the Sevillans practised their trades in town, organised markets and influenced arts and crafts with their decorative techniques in wood work and *zellij*. They settled in a new neighbourhood which still retains their name up to this day: the Andalusian quarter. Certain amongst them, especially those who originated from the region of Valencia, located to the surrounding countryside and contributed to the prosperity of an agriculture already wealthy in terms of fruit: quinces,

granates, Damascus apples, figs, raisins and olives. The city of Meknès is obliged to the Andalusians for attaining the level of prosperity which the chroniclers of the 9th/15th and 10th/16th centuries would focus on; a prosperity which had been difficult to maintain during the centuries characterised by hardships, wars and famine which had affected the whole country, particularly the 9th/15th century. Leon the African, who had visited the city at the beginning of the 10th/16th century, described it as a beautiful, fortified city, well populated, with airy and pleasant streets.

But it was the wish, two centuries later, of the 'Alawite sovereign Mulay Isma'ïl (1082/1672–1139/1727) to construct a capital worthy of a king of Morocco, which gave Meknès a definitive place in history.

Situated in the heart of one of Morocco's wealthiest regions, the city of Meknès offered the further advantage of being far from both the Mediterranean and Atlantic coasts, and thus held an element favourable

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*Dar Jamaï Museum,
exhibition room,
Meknès.*

to the sultan, who decided to situate his family there, a family estimated (often with exaggeration) as being composed of several wives and concubines, several hundred children, and “some two hundred leaders and chiefs who followed him twice a day during his walk, and the 4000 Negroes who formed his guard”. Conscious of keeping face in front of foreign delegations and embassies who had come to negotiate for the release of their

prisoners, Muly Isma‘il sought to gain the respect of the Christian princes, since, according to him, foreign relations towards Morocco could only be kept harmonious if the princes of Morocco were considered to be great builders and veritable men of State. A number of Moroccan ambassadors, stationed in France, England and in Spain, reported to the sovereign on the luxuries of the European courts. Deciding to construct palaces capable of rivalling European palaces, he chose to make Meknès the “Moroccan Versailles”, employing 55,000 men, whether workers or slaves, Christian and Muslim, to undertake the task, commencing in 1082/1672. At the sultan’s death in 1139/1727 (who, having waged battles continuously, had managed to stay in power), the city would come to experience numerous difficulties. As a central authority which was no longer capable of keeping control over the whole country, Meknès suffered several revolts which put a stop to any further developments. And although stability was restored towards the end of the 12th/18th century and the beginning of the 13th/19th century, Meknès would never recover the role it occupied from 1082/1672–1139/1727 as the country’s political capital.

I.1 MEKNÈS

I.1.a Dar Jamaï Museum

Follow the sign marked Ancienne Médina. The museum is found on ‘place al-Hedim’. There is supervised parking around the square. Entrance fee. Open from 09.00–12.00 and 15.00–18.00.

Built at the end of the 19th century, under the reign of Sultan Muly Hassan

(1873–94), this palace belonged to the Jamaï family, whose members were *viziers* to the monarch.

Having fallen from grace at the death of the latter, the family lost its influential position, and its residences were repossessed by the State. Converted into a military hospital during the Protectorate, a section of the palace was handed over for the study of Fine Arts, and thus, in 1926, was transformed into a museum harbouring collections that testify to the artistic traditions of the city of Meknès: ironwork, weaving, leather work, embroidery, book binding and goldsmithing.

This palace, raised off an expansive surface from the ground, consisted of several annexes and subsidiary buildings. On the ground floor, one came across a mosque, a *riyad*, a *minzah*, a court, a small house, a kitchen and a *hammam*. In addition, the annexes outside the palace contained a *funduq* which was transformed into a carpentry workshop, and a fountain which was recently restored. The entrance to the palace was via a gate which was covered with a protruding porch decorated in green tiles. This entrance was put in rather recently, having replaced the original doorway which was situated under the *sabat* of the *riyad*. This ancient palace distinguishes itself on the magnificence of its *riyad*; one can admire the harmony between its two starry basins and its rivulet which cuts across a passageway made of *zellij*. It holds two fountains, and a portico consisting of seven arcades which rest on pillars and differ in height, and which link up to the principal dome under which the *vizier* received his guests. The dome, or *Qubba*, with its chiselled wood ceiling, its stained-glass windows and its large wood lintels, is Andalusian in both conception and decoration.

It is possible to rent a carriage for the remainder of the itinerary, having visited the monuments I.1.b and I.1.c. For the energetic walker it is possible to do most of the tour on foot.

I.1.b Great Mosque

When exiting from the museum, take the road on the left called Sidi Amor Bouaouada. Follow this winding road which leads to the mosque. Access restricted to Muslims.

The Great Mosque, situated in the heart of the *medina*, seems to have been built in the Almoravid era during the 5th/11th century. Important restorations and enlargements were undertaken by the Almohad Sultan Mohamed al-Nassir (595/199–609/1213). He provided the mosque with water which came from the source of Taguema, situat-

The Great Mosque, span of the mihrab, Meknès.



Meknès

Buinaniya Madrasa, bay opening onto the prayer hall and mashrabiyya panels of the entrance bay, Meknès.



ed 5 km. south of the city. The mosque safeguarded, among other things from that period, a copper chandelier which, together with those from the Qarawiyyin Mosque in Fez, represents one of those rare specimens that have survived to the present. The arrival of the Merinids in Meknès during the middle of the 7th/13th century saw the rapid cultural expansion of the city and of the mosque, particularly during the reign of Sultan Abu al-Hassan (731/1331–751/1351), who initiated the construction of the city's three *madrasas* (Buinaniya, al-Qadi and Shuhud). He endowed the mosque with a

number of teaching posts, and installed a scientific library following the example of the one in the Qarawiyyin in Fez, where the *tolba* came to consult manuscripts.

The action taken by the Merinids did not limit itself to just developing the cultural role of the Great Mosque: they also proceeded to undertake restoration and modification work, especially as the minaret of the mosque had collapsed, killing seven worshippers. Today, the mosque, with its 11 gates, stands on an area of 3,500 sq. m. and is composed of two distinctive parts:

Meknès

Buinaniya Madrasa, pillar, stucco panelling in a geometric, floral and epigraphic design with kufic characters, Meknès.

– the prayer hall, consisting of nine bays and a *mihrab* adorned with painted and sculpted motifs done to perfection, granted that they were redone at several intervals by the various dynasties. The *anza*, which served as a *mihrab* during the summer months, was pitched along the side of the prayer hall. This *anza* dates from the time of Mula'y Isma'ïl. It is contemporary, with its raised fountains sitting along the side of the *sahn*.

– the inner court, the *sahn*, a square area surrounded by a gallery. The minaret which rises at the corner of the *sahn* is decorated with square, green tiles.



I.1.c Buinaniya Madrasa

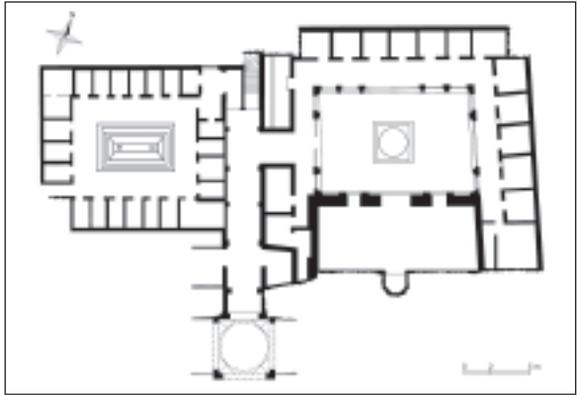
The madrasa is at the end of the road which runs along the Great Mosque.

Entrance fee. Open daily from 09.00–12.00 and 15.00–18.00.

One of Merinid Sultan Abu al-Hassan's masterpieces, the *madrasa* was built in 736/1336 as is testified by two inscriptions, one poetic, covering the *mihrab* in the prayer hall, the other a tribute to the sultan, traced along the wood lintels in the patio: "*Power, success and victory bursting forth from our master Abu al-Hassan, emir of the faithful!*".

Originally called *al-Jadida*, the new madrasa, other than to differentiate it from the old one set up by Abu Yusuf Ya'qub, was re-baptised by the son of Abu al-Hassan, the sovereign Abu Inan, who restored it and gave it his own name: Buinaniya.

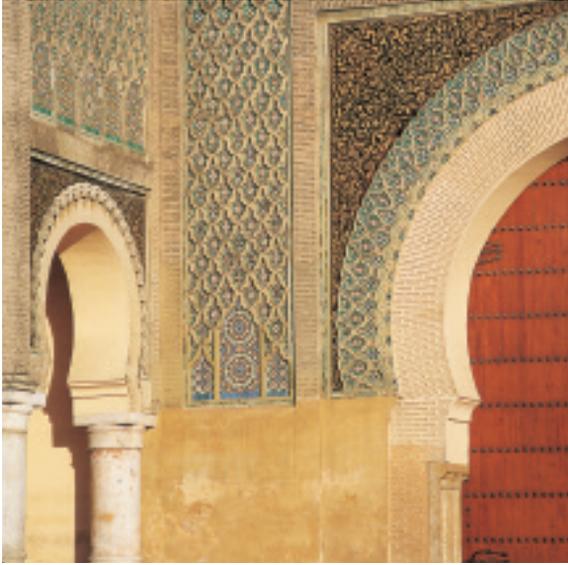
Occupying an area of 315 sq. m., the *madrasa* distinguishes itself even at the point of entry by a wooden door covered in pieces of copper which are exquisitely dec-



orated. A long hallway leads to the *sahn*, around which the main parts of the building base themselves. This courtyard is adorned at its centre with a marble basin in the shape of a shell. The pillars, some of which stand in isolation and some of which are cast into the wall, stretch skywards to the top floor, and are interspersed with wooden lintels. *Mashrabiyya* panels, fixed in between the pillars, served to separate the

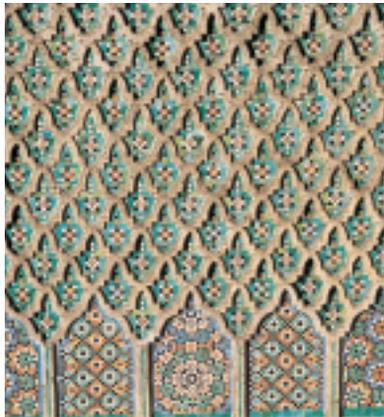
Buinaniya Madrasa, ground-floor plan, Meknès.

Meknès



Bab al-Mansur, entrance bay, detail of the frame decorated in ceramic, Meknès.

Bab al-Mansur, detail of the bay's frame decorated with interlacing, set, tiled mosaics, Meknès.



sahn from the galleries off which the student rooms situated on the ground floor could be reached. Those rooms situated on an upper floor open out onto the courtyard through finely decorated windows. Lessons for young students were taught in the prayer hall, which, being relatively vast,

was endowed with a *mihrab* built into the wall of the *qibla*. This particular *mihrab* is a polygonal niche, furnished on each side with columns which support an arch laid out within a square frame which is covered by an inscription. During Mulay Isma‘il’s reign, a dome was constructed at the entrance to the *madrasa*. Above all, the Buinaniya of Meknès carries the notable imprint of al-Andalus within all its decorative elements: the interior surfaces of the *madrasa* are richly decorated; the ground is covered with *zellij* tiles composing geometric patterns; similarly, the bases of the walls are decorated with *zellij* tiles up to a height of 1.6 m. These designs are crowned by an epigraphic frieze whose characters are black against a light background. Above, one can see geometric, floral and epigraphic stucco motifs. The upper parts of the interior surfaces are decorated with sculpted wood and panels inscribed with Qur’anic verses, religious sayings, dedications, plant motifs, arabesques and reeds.

1.1.d Bab al-Mansur al-‘Alj

Place al-Hedim. Rebuilt as an exhibition hall, it is situated on the furthest side of the square. Recreated as a watercolour painting on canvas, it was one the subjects highlighting “The Era of Morocco” during four months in Place de la Concorde, Paris.

As the most imposing gate in Meknès, Bab al-Mansur al-‘Alj, “The Gate of the Victorious Renegade”, is also one of the most original in Morocco. Its construction, as indicated by the large inscription in kursif characters on the upper part of the monument, began at the end of Mulay Isma‘il’s reign and was completed by his son in 1144/1732.

With an elbow-shaped entrance like most exterior gates of Moroccan towns, the gate opens out onto a bay of 8 m. in height, framed by two square towers which project over some loggias. These two bastions are themselves flanked by two narrower recesses supported by two tall columns of composite capitals.

This gate, remarkable in the proportion and originality of its design, is also astonishing with regards to its elaborate ornamentation, which is dominated by an interlacing pattern. Separated into bandwidths within the framework of the bay and above the dormer arcatures of the two towers, these losange-shaped interlacing patterns, which form a trellis, are encrusted with tiled mosaic, *zellij*, lending a unique charm to this majestic gate. It is recorded that the shafts and capitals of the columns are made from marble exported from Carrara, Italy, something which in itself is quite exceptional. This marble would seem to have originated from the al-Badiya Palace in Marrakesh, which was built by the Sa'adian

prince Ahmed al-Mansur al-Dhahbi (985/1578–1011/1603).

The gate had been used in a variety of ways. In the 19th century, Sultan Mulay 'Abd al-Rahman erected a construction to the left when exiting Bab al-Mansur which served as a place for holding reunions between military leaders and other dignitaries. The building served as a tribunal for the town *pasha*, who, together with military leaders, lunched there each Friday after prayers. Religious and military ceremonies were also organised to take place in front of this monument. These customs were maintained right up until the Protectorate was established in 1912.

I.1.e Pavilion of the Ambassadors

Return to the car and, after driving past the gate on the right of Bab al-Mansur, follow the sign Mulay Isma'il Mausoleum. There is parking opposite the dome on place Al-Khayyatın. Entrance fee. Open daily from 09.00–12.00 and 15.00–18.00.



Dome of the Ambassadors, exterior view, Meknès.

Meknès

This pavilion, which is still called a dome, is a small building placed next to the first enclosure of the city. Known today as the “Dome of the Tailors”, a title which evokes one of its more recent uses, it was nevertheless known for long time as the Dome of the Ambassadors. This designation corresponds to the building’s primary function, as Mulay Isma‘il had decided to receive foreign ambassadors there who, among other things, had come to bargain to buy back Christian captives.

Built on a large rectangular area of 6 m. x 8.2 m., the building joins onto a square whose sides measure 13.8 m. each. The entrance is covered by an overhanging porch which was added on afterwards. The monumental door is decorated with strips of *zellij* which form a geometric composition, and with friezes of sculpted wood. Here and there within the dome stands a small chamber, whose ceiling is surfaced with green tiles, and whose floor is chequered with *zellij* in a variety of colours, including blue, yellow, white and red.

The interior of the dome, as large as it is harmonious, is made up of 10 arcades which face one another, bearing sculpted plaster motifs which have been partially restored. The pillars which support the arcades are covered in mosaics up to a height of 2 m. The base of the dome’s walls are themselves also decorated with mosaic and are crowned by a band of stucco on which is inscribed: “*Power belongs to Allah*”. This building is essentially esteemed for its conical dome whose interior structure is decorated with geometric and floral motifs.

1.1.f Mulay Isma‘il Mausoleum

Situated opposite the dome. Non-muslims are also allowed in.

Free entry. Open daily from 08:30–12.00 and 15.30–20.00.

The royal funeral compound of the Kasbah in Meknès is situated south of the *Dar al-Kebira*, in between the first and third enclosure. Its location owes nothing to chance, since Mulay Isma‘il chose as his mortuary a sacred place which had been previously sanctified by the tomb of a local saint, Sidi ‘Abd al-Rahman al-Majdhub, poet and mystic of the 10th / 16th century. The sultan Mulay Ahmed al-Dhahbi, son and successor of Mulay Isma‘il, ushered in a number of changes. The irregularity demonstrated in the construction, in which certain rooms seem as if they were dug out of the walls, shows that it is made up of an entity which was revised at various stages.

Before going into a detailed description of this immense compound, it is important to give a general overview of this funerary entity. The two *qubbas* which determined the choice of location decided upon by Mulay Isma‘il appear to have been joined together, during an earlier period, by a row of the three following elements: patio, funeral hall and Qur’anic lecture hall. It seems that the annexed sections were not part of the original design.

Even if this mausoleum is in no way indebted to those infinitely more complex mausoleums of the East, it can at least be said to be a direct descendant of the Sa‘adian tombs of Marrakesh, whose origins are in themselves truly Hispano-Maghrebic. Thus, in the design of the mausoleum, Mulay Isma‘il imitated the series of three chambers, one being the square-shaped central room which shelters the prince’s tomb, which can be likened to the succession of the three rooms of the Rauda in Granada. Further-



Mausoleum, Mula' al-Mu'ayyad, Meknès.

more, the motif of having a square-shaped room with an ante-chamber seems in this instance to have been directly inspired by Granada's palatial, rather than by its funerary architecture.

The initial design seems to have grouped the row of three rooms to the east together with the outbuildings to the west and to the south, in other words joining the Grand courtyard to two porticoes. Originally, the entrance to this compound was found to the north, facing *Dar al-Kebira*; the actual entrance dates from the time of the Protectorate.

The entrance and the first courtyards

The first compound out onto which the mausoleum's entrance door opens is composed of an entrance hall with three annexes: three courtyards. Whilst this first chamber and the first courtyard are viewed as being used for the purposes of distribution, and the second courtyard is seen as a means of passage, the third courtyard is there to offer a décor and environment suitable for a place in which to rest. The latter differentiates itself through having two porticoes

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Grain Silos
vaulted arcatures,
Meknès.



which stand opposite each other, the eastern one facing the western one, with a deep round basin in its centre. A simple and hexagonal *mihrab* was built into the wall of the eastern portico, and a second was embedded into the eastern wall of the courtyard. Two doors along the lengthy sides of this third courtyard are boarded up.

The patio and the funeral halls

The patio, situated in the north-eastern corner of the funeral compound, is a

result of rigorous and painstaking labour, which has recently been taken up again, reincorporating the older features. It is distinguished by some marble columns, set out in groups of three, crowned by capitals, of which a certain number are Hispano-Maghrebic in type: a capital which places a cylindrical half with its two rows of leaves in opposition to a heavy prism-shaped half, and with its large décor of palm leaves and palmettes engraved rather than sculpted.

This patio communicates with the other funeral halls through a door built into the

southern and richly decorated wall. It allows access into a sort of ante-chamber which opens out in a big way onto the mortuary via a smooth, horseshoe and slightly pointed bay. The funeral slabs belonging to Mulay Isma‘il, to his successor Ahmed al-Dhahbi and to the Sultan ‘Abd al-Rahman Ibn Hisham sit in the centre of the hall.

I.1.g Grain Silos

Accessible by car. Located on the far north side of the kasbah. Take a left when leaving the mausoleum and go through the Bab al-Rih gate in order to walk alongside the Royal Palace. The silo scheme was in the past known under the name of Dar al-Makhzen. Follow the road to the end, take a right, and proceed straight ahead, going past the main entrance of the Royal Palace (on the right) and walk further still along the camping area from where one can see the silos.

Entrance fee. Open daily from 09.00–12.00 and 15.00–18.00.

A work of Mulay Isma‘il’s doing, the House with Ten Norias is part of a tripartite compound which consists of a trapezoidal building, a series of parallel barrel vaults whose ceilings have crumbled, the silos, and a trapezoidal basin, the Basin of the Norias. A building with a functional utility, it stands as evidence of Mulay Isma‘il’s desire to endow his city with infrastructures which would allow him to be prepared for all eventualities, to be armed against possible dangers from abroad, and to fulfil his ambitions through safeguarding his city’s imperial status in the same way as Fez and Marrakesh safeguarded theirs.

The House with Ten Norias

Inside this building, a series of cramped rooms surround a central, more spacious chamber of scantily built barrel vaults, and a corridor winds itself around this central massif by lining a system of 15 rooms covered with 12-piece conical vaults. Orig-



Basin of the Norias, general view, Meknès.

Meknès

Bab Berdeïn, general view, outside entrance, Meknès.



nally, each round room contained a *noria*, that is to say a deep well that reached the phreatic layer by means of a chain of buckets with pointed bases. The silos were built adjacent to this hydraulic scheme; silos which were too often incorrectly referred to as stables.

The Silos

A series of 22 arcades consisting of 14 arches each, a number of which were later blocked up, are located adjacent to the south-west wall of the building of the Ten Norias. These corridors were incorrectly called stables when they were in fact silos.

Considered to be one of the most beautiful works accomplished by the Sultan Mulay Isma‘il, the building was intended to store food products, particularly wheat, as was noted by the historian al-Nassiri in the 19th century: “*Mulay Isma‘il*

also ordered for the construction of a granary to be built inside the kasbah which would be used for provisions, with vaulted corridors for the storage of wheat and other grains, which could hold enough grain to feed every inhabitant of Morocco”.

The mules which carried the wheat from different regions did not enter via the main gates of the building but crossed over an alleyway which brought them to circular openings pierced into the building’s terrace, into which the wheat was tipped. The building, constructed on an area of 182 m. in length and 104 m. in width, contained large rectangular rooms which were in fact underground granaries, even if today all their ceilings have collapsed and there is no longer a trace of “holes in the ceilings” which would have been used there. A central alleyway is maintained in a user-friendly condition as far up as to the back wall. Pillars, which hold up arches whose full arc measures 3 m. diametrically, divide the room into 18 bays and 23

naves, originally covered with barrel vaulting. This part of the *kasbah* is particularly impressive today; the picturesque and flowery expansiveness suits this series of hard-packed clay arcades marvelously.

1.1.h Basin of the Norias

Situated at the foot of the building which shelters the silos.

According to the historian Ibn Zidane, Mulay Isma‘il “built inside the *kasbah* a Grand chamber of water, across which one could sail in a pleasure boat”. In spite of this description, its functional utility outweighs its element of leisure, since not a single aesthetic preoccupation seems to have prevailed in the construction of the basin.

The basin named the Basin of the Norias, *Sahrij Swani*, is one of the three buildings which constitute the compound known as the House with Ten Norias.

The construction of this hydraulic building fulfilled the population’s need for water – the city having been besieged several times by regional tribes – and to provide water to the buildings and work camps of the city, such as the mosques, the bathhouses, the homes, the gardens and the orchards.

This rectangular shaped artificial basin, remarkable in its size of 148.75 m.× 319 m., with a mean depth of 1.20 m., was supplied by ten norias from the neighbouring building, located underneath the subterranean silos; the norias themselves were linked to the basin via channels made out of pottery. Originally, three high crenellated walls would have surrounded the basin. All that is left now is an isolated rampart near the Bani Mhamed neighbourhood in the south-

west, and the base of an enclosure more than 2 m. in thickness.

A Walk in the Medina

It is possible to reach monument 1.1.i on foot by crossing the medina. Return to place al-Hedim. Pass the Dar Jamaï museum’s vault on the left, and walk towards rue Nejjarin which specialises in the sale of textiles and babouches (oriental slippers). In following the road towards the west, and after having entered rue Sekkarin, one reaches an exit situated within the west wall of the medina which leads to the Mellah. In taking this exit, and in following the alleyway which contours the ramparts from the outside, one comes across a very colourful spice market, followed by a flea market not far from the tanneries of Meknès. In reentering the medina through Bab al-Jdid, take rue al-Hanaya on the left to climb northwards in the direction of the Berdeïn Mosque which is near the Bab Berdeïn.

1.1.i Bab Berdeïn

Located on the far north of the medina. By car, take the circular boulevard, the gate is on your right.

The enclosures of the Isma‘ili Kasbah were originally built with 20 fortified gates covered by bastions. Bab Berdeïn, the gate of the pack-saddle makers, situated in the northern part of the city’s enclosure, today consists of two gates separated by a courtyard.

The ancient gate, erected by Mulay Isma‘il in 1132/1720, stands on the summit of a hill and appears both majestic and slender in between its two towers, hanging over the curtain wall. The decorated section of this gate (which does not lead into

Mulay Idriss Zerhun

a bend unlike other gates), a square which measures just over 11 m. on each side, was recently restored. This gate must have held, in the 12th/18th century, and in contrast to today, an important role in Meknès' economy, having been the focus for all commercial as well as diplomatic transactions with the north and thus with foreign lands. One therefore imagines that Mulay Isma'îl endowed this entrance to the *medina* with a gate that was worthy of a royal neighbourhood. The new gate, Bab Berdeïn, can be found close by. It opens out onto the mausoleum of Mulay 'Abd Allah Ibn Ahmed, onto the cemetery of the Shuhadas and onto the large cemetery where a number of saints of Meknès such as Shaykh al-Kamal and Sidi al-Harthi were buried.

1.2 MULAY IDRIS ZERHUN (option)

1.2.a Mulay Idriss Zerhun Mausoleum

The village of Mulay Idriss can be found on the Ketrina road, 28km. from Meknès. The mausoleum is located at the centre of the village. Access restricted to Muslims.

A large white village attached to the side of the Zerhun mountain, the mausoleum-town dominates the surrounding plateau and looks over towards the Roman ruins of Volubilis. It is a small town, famous because it holds the mausoleum of the prince who founded the first Muslim Moroccan dynasty. Mulay Idriss Ibn 'Abd Allah, the fifth descendant of the Prophet's son-in-law 'Ali, escaping the wars fought between the Abbassids and the Umayyads in Arabia, came to Morocco, where he

was welcomed as the descendant of the Prophet's family. The local Berber prince of Walili, who had rallied himself behind Islam, called upon the tribes to follow the *shorfa* (sg. *Sharif*). But Mulay Idriss' premature death in 176/793, without doubt the result of being poisoned on the orders of the Abbassid Caliph, did not leave him with sufficient time to give his dynasty the structure he would have wanted to give it. Before his death he had married a Berber called Kenza who was to bear him a son posthumously. He was called Idriss the Second and continued the work of his father.

The tomb of Idriss the father, built as a mausoleum with its own dome, became the place of a saint venerated by Moroccans. The monument remained more or less unchanged until the 11th/17th century, when the 'Alawite Sultan Mulay Isma'îl gave the order to demolish it and to buy the neighbouring properties in order to add them to the mausoleum. Building works lasted nearly three years, from 1131/1719–1133/1721. Mulay Isma'îl ordained it with the Friday prayer, a sign of the importance which was given to the mausoleum and to Mulay Idriss Zerhoun's town.

In 1237/1822, the 'Alawite Sultan Mulay 'Abd al-Rahman took his turn at enlarging and embellishing the mausoleum: he bought the house next to the dome which stood between this monument and the *qaysariya*, and demolished it in order to build an even bigger and more beautiful mosque. The mausoleum of the saint was thus decorated again.

The dome was embellished with gorgeous ceramics by the Grand *m'alle*m (an artisan who qualified in ceramics in Meknès) Ibn Makhlu'f during the reign of the Sultan Sidi Mohamed (1859–1873).

Sultan Mohamed V (1927–1961) and his son King Hassan II (1929–1999) initiated the redecoration of the *Darih*, the mausoleum, and once again enlarged the mosque. To this day, Mulay Idriss is the object every year of a large pilgrimage which takes place on the occasion of the saint's *Mussem*. Numerous tribes then come into the mausoleum to pray. The veil, richly decorated with golden embroidery, which covers up the saint's catafalque, is changed once a year or once every two years amidst a religious ceremony in which the political and religious authorities of the country or of the region participate.

It is a veritable celebration full of song, full of the odour of perfume and of sacrifices, and of the noise of gunfire, during which pilgrims fill the town in a long procession.

Volubilis

5 km. from Mulay Idriss and 31 km. from Meknès lie the most important Roman ruins in Morocco. The site of Volubilis is in fact one of Morocco's cultural highlights. The ancient capital of King Juba II, husband of Cleopatra's and Mark Antony's daughter, it encloses the entire Roman history of Morocco.

Entrance fee. Open daily.

Mohamed Mezzine



Portrait of the Great Sherif Mulay Isma‘il, engraving from the 18th century.

State, as in undertakings of secondary importance, he considered himself to be the first and to set the example. “*Whether in war or in the projects undertaken during peacetime, such as the development of Meknès in which one sees him frequently put his hands to work as if it were his job*”, his effectual presence could never be faulted.

Mulay Isma‘il, the second Sultan of the ‘Alawite dynasty, spent 24 years of his long 55-year reign pacifying the country, fighting the undefeated and insurgents, and establishing political order. To have done so he needed a strong, permanent and devoted army. He organised one from black conscripts numbering approximately 150,000 men, whom he forced to take oath on the book of *hadiths* of the Imam al-Bukhari, one of the four great traditionalists of Islam; this is where the title ‘*Abids al-Bukhari*’, “Slaves of al-Bukhari”, which they were given, derives from. On the other hand, he also needed a presence which would remain permanent throughout the territory. He achieved this through the nationwide construction of fortresses in which he placed heavily armed contingents charged with maintaining order or holding back tribes which had not yet been vanquished.

Towards 1111/1700, the reign of Mulay Isma‘il reached its climax. The entirety of Morocco, which includes Mauritania, and Tuat obeyed him. He leads naval battles from which he collects 70 per cent of the captured cargoes’ value. Economic contacts with Europe are reestablished and European commercial firms make their presence felt in Tétouan, Salé, Safi and Agadir. Areas on the Atlantic coastline once occupied by Spain were reclaimed. Numerous diplomatic exchanges take place with France and with England. All in all, Morocco’s relationships with the

A vigorous man, well-built, quite tall but very slender in size, Mulay Isma‘il, characterised by “*a long face, more black than white, that is to say decidedly mulatto*” was “*the strongest and most active man of his States*” according to Saint-Olon, the ambassador of Louis XIV to the Sultan. Possessing a strong will which would rise to any challenge – “*If God gave me the kingdom, then no-one can take it away from me*” was a phrase he liked to repeat to himself – as well as having great political insight, Mulay Isma‘il intended to forever remain the “*primus inter pares*”. In the affairs of

Grand countries of Europe regulated itself and was intensified.

A contemporary of Louis XIV, Mulay Isma‘il is considered, by his own contemporaries as by nearly all chroniclers, to be the greatest monarch of the ‘Alawite dynasty during its first two centuries of existence. Like Louis XIV, he was set on distinguishing his reign and on leaving behind his indelible mark on the country. He had thus resolved to construct a Royal City, conceived and planned entirely by him: this became the Royal City of Meknès which he raised to the status of a Capital City.

On the Sultan’s death (1139/1727) –having held onto power until his death through constantly going to battle– the city would encounter numerous problems. This was because the entire construction created by Mulay Isma‘il resided entirely on his

person. To take an example: his army, which had been conceived to be the keeper not only of the State’s strength but also of its perpetuity, became a dominant destabilising force through its movements and direct interventions in political affairs. For 30 years, practically without fail, the army imposed its rule, nominating and deposing sultans. The result was the ruin of the country: empty of treasure, its economy destroyed, social anarchy, and so on.

Legend, and Moroccan and foreign chronicles have left us with this picture of the Grand Sultan. But only the French chronicles held the correspondence between Louis XIV and Mulay Isma‘il in which the latter asks the King of France for the hand in marriage of the Princess of Conti for his brother.